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Committee on Conferences
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Draft report

Addendum

Rapporteur: Mr. Andrius **Namavičius** (Lithuania)

Meeting statistics of United Nations organs and consultations with and/or letters to bodies concerning utilization of the conference services available to them

Introduction and overview

1. At its 452nd meeting, on 8 September 2003, the Committee on Conferences reviewed the statistical data given in section II.B(1) and annex I of the Secretary-General's report on pattern of conferences (A/58/194 and Corr.1) on the planned and actual utilization of conference resources allocated to a core sample of bodies that had met in New York, Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi in 2002, and considered an oral report by the Chairman of the Committee on his consultations with bodies concerning utilization of the conference services available to them. In keeping with section II.A, paragraph 16, of General Assembly resolution 57/283 B, 12 bodies had been identified that had consistently utilized less than the applicable benchmark figure of their allocated resources during their previous three sessions. The Chairman and the Department had held consultations with or sent letters to the chairpersons and secretariats of those bodies in an effort to resolve the problem.

2. Underutilization of conference-servicing resources resulted in some cases from meetings being cancelled too late to schedule another meeting into the time slot, often a sign that planning accuracy could be improved. A persistent pattern of cancellations could be resolved either by shortening the duration of the body's session or reducing the scheduled number of meetings within the same time frame. That solution had been successful, for example, with the Committee on Contributions.

3. For some of the organs concerned, however, late starts or early endings were the main cause of low utilization. In some cases, the problem could be resolved by

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convening meetings in a timely manner, without a quorum, if necessary, and having ready additional items if consideration of an agenda item should be concluded sooner than anticipated. The Sixth Committee had been successful with those methods.

4. In accordance with decisions of the Committee on Conferences, the time utilized for informal meetings or consultations held before the start or after the adjournment of officially scheduled meetings, when utilizing the same services and with due notification given to the Secretariat, was not included as time lost. However, several of the bodies had stressed that, given the sensitive and political aspect of their work, the capacity to hold informal consultations utilizing conference room facilities was also important. If time used in that manner were not deducted from time lost due to early adjournment in calculating the utilization factor, they would be hard pressed to raise their statistics above the benchmark figure. The Chairman suggested that the Committee should give serious consideration to certain mitigating factors in methodology.

Discussion

5. Delegations expressed satisfaction with the efforts to hold discussions with underutilizers, since expensive resources were being wasted. A number of delegations felt that it was best to seek a solution tailored to the specific body, on a case-by-case basis, without necessarily changing the general methodology. Although reservations were expressed about being more lenient to some bodies than to others, it was also said that it was a matter of being adaptable, rather than lenient. The view was expressed that it was important to respect the principle of using all official languages, and it was not ideal to hold consultations without interpretation. It was also stated that, as much as possible, the time released from cancelled meetings or early adjournments should be made available to regional groups.

6. A representative of the Secretariat explained that, although there were as yet no benchmarks established for the planning accuracy factor, the Department had found it to be a useful tool in its discussions with underutilizers since, given sufficient notice, it was easier to reschedule a whole block of meeting time than a fragment.

Conclusions

7. The Committee noted that the overall utilization factor for the four United Nations offices in 2002, 75 per cent, was one percentage point higher than in 2001, but still five percentage points lower than in 2000. The slight improvement in 2002 was reflected in three of the duty stations and was due solely to a decrease in time lost owing to late starts and early endings, the sharp increase in this figure having been the cause of the 6 per cent drop in utilization from 2000 to 2001. There was very little change in the number of cancellations.

8. The Committee also noted that the 75 per cent utilization factor was five percentage points lower than the benchmark figure established by the General Assembly and was still an unacceptable loss of resources. The Chairman of the Committee again conducted consultations with the chairpersons and/or secretaries of the bodies that had underutilized for three years in a row, urging them to consider changes in their programme of work and to introduce more discipline into the way they conducted their business. In 2003, however, several

bodies had stressed the need to bring into the equation the informal consultations that often took place after a formal meeting was adjourned, as noted in the Chairman's oral report on meetings with those bodies consistently underutilizing their resources.

9. **The Committee requested the Chairman to continue to consult on its behalf with the chairpersons of bodies that had consistently utilized less than the applicable benchmark figure of their allocated resources for the past three sessions, pursuant to the requests of the General Assembly set out in section B, paragraphs 6 and 7, of its resolution 54/248, with a view to making appropriate recommendations in order to achieve the optimum utilization of conference-servicing resources.**

10. **The Committee was of the opinion that certain factors, such as the planning accuracy factor, which was a relevant planning tool for the Secretariat, should be taken into consideration when judging individual bodies.**